HOW TO HELP YOUR PARISH PRIEST

PRICE TWOPENCE

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ONE of the greatest problems of the Church to-day is the problem of her *unemployed*, the vast number of her members who come to church to be ministered unto but not to minister, to get but not to give. Two results follow for the Church, inefficiency and impeded progress, for the idle Churchman stagnation, boredom, dullness. In nine cases out of ten, when people lose interest in their religion it is because they have not been doing enough work for it. Inactivity is always lacking in *thrill*. There *is* plenty of work for everyone to do. The subject of Christian Service in its wider meaning, *i.e.* the treating of our daily work as a vocation, a call to the service of God, is fully treated in other tracts issued by the Catholic

Literature Association.* Our purpose here is to survey the more limited field of definite church work, and to consider ways in which the average church member with no special gifts or qualifications can help the parish priest in carrying on the work of the Church.

Let us consider, then, the priest's work, beginning with the most important part of it, the offering of the holy Sacrifice, the conduct of the rest of the Church's worship, and the administration of the Sacraments. This brings into view at once the service of the Sanctuary, a form of work which the Catholic layman should regard as a high privilege. High Mass has been called " one of the

* See John Bull Tracts, Nos. 78, 79, 95, 96.

supreme triumphs of art in all time." Have you ever thought of the immense amount of preparation involved if it is to be offered with its true beauty, dignity, and repose? Candles, incense, charcoal, wafers, wine have to be bought, stored, paid for; vestments must be cared for; altar-linen, albs, cottas washed and repaired; servers carefully trained; music rehearsed; altar vessels cleaned; flowers arranged. So the list goes on. It is one of the great blessings of the Catholic system of worship that it gives so many people something to do. Here, very likely, your offer of service would be welcomed; and even if you do not feel drawn to help in this kind of way, remember that every layman ought at least to know how to serve a Low Mass.

How often one sees a priest at the altar without a server. This ought never to happen if there is a man in the congregation, and it does not happen among Roman Catholics. In a Roman church, if the server is absent, some layman from the congregation goes up to the altar step in his ordinary clothes and serves the Mass as a matter of course. He has been taught to serve as part of his religious education, and regards it as a high duty and privilege to help in this way whenever occasion requires.

Next, there is the priest's work as teacher. Here you can be of real help, especially in these days when there is so much talk about the Catholic Religion, and with it so much ignorance, prejudice, and misunderstanding. In all

probability you constantly meet people who are full of prejudices against the Faith, and whom your priest cannot teach, because they would not dream of entering a Catholic church. It is never any good arguing with them—argument does not convert people—but a courteous, simple, good-tempered explanation of some difficulty or misunderstanding may be the means of doing a great deal of good. Outsiders are often much more impressed by what a layman says about his religion than by what a priest says.

There is, however, one essential condition for this kind of service. You must *know* the Faith. You can never satisfactorily explain to other people what you do not thoroughly understand yourself.

Here, again, Roman Catholics are, as a rule, much better qualified than we are, because they are better instructed. Many of us came to the Faith after we were grown up, and, perhaps, have never had a course of definite instruction. Here, then, is an important practical suggestion: you can help your priest by *reading*. Make regular use of the tract case, and *never give a tract to a non-Catholic until you have read it yourself*. An increasing number of Catholics are forming the habit of reading a tract every week, and then handing it on to a friend. There are few ways of helping that are more simple, practical, and effective than this.

In this connection, if you have a certain amount of leisure time, and no one else is doing the work,

you might offer yourself as tract case secretary. This is work for the layman and not for the priest, and very delightful work it is. It entails keeping in constant touch with the Catholic Literature Association, making a note of all new publications, interesting people in the tracts, collecting moneys, keeping an account of sales, keeping the tract case well supplied, and last, but by no means least, *keeping it well dusted and clean*. A dirty, dusty, neglected-looking tract case is no ornament to a church, and does more harm than good.

Then there is the priest's work as pastor. Here, for those who have the time and the necessary qualifications, there is help to be given in visiting, in the organization of guilds, in the work of

the Mothers' Union, and so on. Under this head, too, very valuable work can be done in welcoming new-comers to the church, and making them feel at home. This is specially the work of the sidesmen (who do not exist, as is sometimes supposed, simply for the purpose of collecting the alms); but all can take their share in it. It is sad to hear, as we sometimes do, of people who have been attending a church for a whole year, and yet nobody has spoken to them, and they have felt "out of things," as they say. It is no doubt foolish and unreasonable of them not to have made themselves known to the priest, who cannot be expected to notice everyone in a large congregation. But if people are shy and reserved, it is useless to say it is their own

fault; the sensible and practical thing is to speak to them and let them see that they are welcome. It needs considerable tact, this shepherding of new-comers, but it is very valuable work, and, if wisely done, will be of real help to your parish priest.

Once more, there is the priest's administrative work, finance, correspondence, organization, relief, the care of the church fabric, and so on. This is, strictly speaking, not the priest's work at all, but he very often has to do most of it, and ultimately is responsible for all of it. If you feel drawn to this kind of work you are exactly the kind of person who ought to be on the Church Council, and to serve on one of its committees. A Church Council composed of practising Catholics who

realize that their business is not to interfere with the conduct of the services, but to take off the shoulders of their priest the burden of administration, leaving him only the responsibility of general superintendence in this respect, can be of the greatest possible help to him. And what is said here about the Council applies even more to the Churchwardens. The office of warden ought to be highly prized and honoured, for it carries with it great privileges and great responsibilities. The efficiency and happiness of church life depend very greatly on the wardens. They can do more than anyone else to help the priest in his work.

Nothing has been said about the work of the Sunday School and Catechism, for we are realizing

more and more that it is not work for the average layman, but requires special qualifications and training. But for those who have the necessary gift, and who are willing to give the time for the essential training, there is no department of church work more attractive and more fruitful. Beyond this, there is the whole department of social work, to which no more than a passing reference can be made. Cubs and Brownies, Scouts and Guides, Rovers and Rangers, clubs and other social organizations, all provide opportunities for those who are willing to help the parish priest.

One necessary department of work remains to be mentioned. It is the basis of all the other effective activities of a parish,

and a work which every devout layman ought to share. This is the work of prayer. Do you pray regularly for your parish priest? There are few people who need your prayers more than he, or who have a stronger claim on them. Your intentions offered for him, and your frequent attendance at the daily Mass, will do more to help and strengthen and encourage him than anything else. Here, too, the sick and infirm can take their part in his work of intercession for his people, for they have enforced leisure, while he, after saying his Mass and Office, and making his Meditation, has often very little time left for prayer during the day. Many a priest knows that the success of his work is due, under God, to the constant faithful prayers of

a few members of his congregation. Remember that your priest needs all the help of every kind that he can get, and one of the most fruitful and practical ways in which you can help him is by praying for him. Your *prayer* means his *power*.